

I Want To Go To Work, But I Can't

By Pete Bowman, CGCS

I do not mind admitting that in my career as a Golf Course Superintendent, there were a few days when I did not want to go to work. Having worked at eight golf courses — five as Golf Course Superintendent — in the last eighteen years, there have been more than just a few days when I did not want to get out of bed to go to work at that #/@/% golf course again! But I did get out of bed, wishing that I was the kind of guy who did not feel guilty about calling in sick when I knew I was not, and went to work anyway, pretending to enjoy myself that day.

On each of those days, whether it was frosty or raining, or hot or humid, or the new boss' first day, not matter how badly I wanted to stay home, I could always manage to get to work and did.

I now have a job that no matter how badly I do want to get to work, and believe me, I do want to get to work, I cannot. Well, at least for a few days at a time, anyway.

The Diablo Grande project is under construction in Patterson, California, in Stanislaus County. Plans call for a world class destination resort with two 18-hole golf courses, hotel and conference center, spa, eques-

trian center, shopping, a private label winery, and several thousand homes. Future plans call for another three to five golf courses. Diablo Grande will be a sister resort to Chateau Elan, the resort in north Georgia where the Gene Sarazen World Open has been played in November of the last two years. Open champions from all over the world are invited to play at The Legends Course, in Braselton, Georgia.

Patterson, California, as I am sure you all must already know, is the self-proclaimed (I think) "Apricot Capital of the World." What do you mean you still do not know where Patterson is? Well, for those of you who still do not know, Patterson is about twenty miles or so south of Tracy, California, and about that far west of Turlock, California. Okay, for those of you who still have no idea where on earth Patterson is, it is a little less than two hours east of San Francisco and about that far south of Sacramento, on Interstate 5. We are about an hour east of Livermore, and south of Stockton. Pull out a map of California, I think we're on it. Patterson is a flat, Central Valley farming town for the most part, with a population of roughly 9,500.

All the problems arise when you get off Interstate 5 at the Patterson exit. The Diablo Grande project is actually about eleven miles west of Patterson, on Oak Flat Road. Oak Flat Road from the Highway 5 underpass to the golf course is about ten miles of twisting and turning, mostly one lane dirt roadway. From about 100 feet above sea level at Interstate 5 to the golf course, the road climbs 1,100 feet through some fairly rough terrain. At 1,100 feet elevation, we have been above the tule fog on all but a few days so far.

On a dry day, Caterpillar 637 scrapers and D-8 dozers, water trucks, and road graders rule the road, and if they are coming your way, you better pull over, and fast! Mountains can be moved, thanks to dozers and dynamite. The road is itself quite a project, not to mention the golf courses. But only on the dry days do we have to watch ourselves on the road. The wet days are a different story.

When I started at Diablo Grande in September, 1995, my first question was "when is the road going to be done?" The project manager chuckled and replied "next spring, if we're lucky!"

"Surely, you must be kid-

ding," I said, "after all, I have to be able to get employees in to do necessary maintenance work all winter. I will need to have equipment, seed, fertilizers, topdressing sand, and other supplies delivered all through the winter. So, come on, really, when will the road be done?"

"No, I'm not kidding," he replied, "and don't call me Shirley." Okay, I'm kidding about 'Shirley' but not at all about the road.

Between December 10, 1995, which was the first rain we had since last spring, and December 23, 1995, I was able to get to work and back exactly four times. That one lane dirt roadway is now a one lane mudway. We got in on Sunday, December 17, after a full week of not being able to get in. Luckily, we were able to mow greens, fairways, and roughs. At that time, we did not have any tees ready for mowing. We were also able to get in on Friday and Saturday, December 22 and 23, and got some mowing and fertilizing done. January was a 'good' month, we missed only three days due to sloppy road conditions.

The golf course itself weathered the rains quite well with very little erosion or other damage. In fact, once we were



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able to actually get to the course, the maintenance tasks were almost as easy to accomplish as they were before the rains. Only once did we get a mower stuck. Thankfully, only one green had been damaged by wild pigs which come out of the hills at night, and it was only slight damage. Call me if you want to go pig hunting.

But then there are the cows! We had some cattle on ranches surrounding my last course, (Merced Hills, in Merced, California) but only once did any get on to the golf course, and at the time we did not have much grass, so they did not stay long. Diablo Grande was a 33,000 acre cattle ranch, and mostly still is, except where we are actually developing areas. If there is anything I know about cows that I never knew before, it is that they know the color green! At least six times we have had to play cowboys with our carts in order to run them off the course, and on all but one occasion, the same cow and her calf were the culprits. No matter what gate we took them to, they would find their way back to the green grass. Luckily, they do not seem too attracted to the low cut greens, much preferring freshly laid blue/rye sod. The guys who sell Primo can safely say that

Primo does not kill cows. I almost wish it did. We had several acres of sod treated with Primo before it was cut in the field. Seems that it is working great, except that it does not ward off hungry cattle. If you have never had cows on your course, count your blessings. Call me if you want to go cow hunting. Pete Bowman, CGCS and C. Certified Golf Course Superintendent and Cowboy. Cowboy. Time to update my resume!

Back to the road story . . . on Monday, December 18, 1995, we were able to get to work but left early because it started to pour around 11:00 a.m. The contractor building the road called up to the course saying that he was sending his employees home, and that if we wanted to get towed out if we got stuck, we better leave right away. He would wait for our last car out before going home himself. It usually takes about twenty-five minutes to get back down the hill on a dry day. Well, we left right away, and three and a half hours later made it to the freeway after getting stuck, even in a four wheel drive truck, and getting towed out by a Cat D-8 and a chain. Four more days off after that one.

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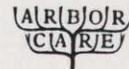
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I Want To Go To Work, But

Have you ever tried to be a telecommuting Golf Course Superintendent? It is impossible. I managed to get a few items ordered over the phone with a few vendors, even though I could not take delivery because the road was too muddy. Can you imagine only being able to wonder what your golf course will look like after some heavy downpours, wondering because you know you cannot get there anyway?

What a strange feeling that is. Think about it for a moment. Most of us can at least get to work to survey the damage after a storm. Even if I cannot do anything about the rain, I at least want to know what my course will look like afterward. I have had what seemed like sleepless nights before in my career, wondering how my Poa annua greens would look the next day after the stifling summer heat in southern California. Sleepless because I would wonder whether my outdated irrigation system would have shut down during the night. But now I lose sleep wondering what my course will look like . . . wondering if I will even be able to get there in the morning.

I want to go to work, but I can't . . . what a feeling. I guess it is not as bad as wanting to go to work but not having a job.

Have you ever heard the saying, "you can't get there from here?" That is how I have felt the last couple of months, and who knows, if this winter is anything like last winter, maybe I'll have that feeling from now until April. I am beginning to think that instead of a company truck, I will need a company helicopter to get to work!

Project update: as of February 1st, we still have two fairways and tees, and one green to seed on The Ranch Course (first 18), with a hoped-for opening in late Spring, 1996. Rough grading has begun on eight holes of The Legends Course (second 18) with several lakes dug already. We hope to open The Legends Course Summer, 1997, and host the Gene Sarazen World Open soon thereafter. The hotel and winery will begin construction Spring, 1996, with homes sites following. Of course, all those dates depend on how bad the rest of this winter is, because we might not be able to get there anyway. What a feeling! ♦

Pete Bowman, CGCS, recently joined the GCSANC. Pete is Immediate Past President of the Sierra Nevada GCSA, and current President of the California GCSA.

And Some Things Do Change

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and operating the irrigation system. Who would have ever thought?

Grass varieties have changed. Seeded bermudagrasses are getting finer textured, Kentucky bluegrasses tolerate slightly lower mowing heights, perennial ryegrasses and bentgrasses more heat tolerant. This is not to mention endophyte enhancement and the possibility of introducing a gene into turf that would make it tolerant to glyphosate applications. Zoysiagrass and buffalograss may in the future hold great potential as low maintenance turfs for roughs and fairways.

Water quality has changed, and mother nature has had little to do with it. Politics and availability in arid climates have placed golf courses in the position to become water recyclers. Effluent, reclaimed or non-potable, no matter what you call it, golf courses are now using it. In the future, whether effluent is used or not, we can expect further restrictions to be placed upon golf courses, like those currently in Arizona. Using low quality water as impacted how greens are managed from day to day. Gone are the days of firm, dry greens, as leaching salts must be

performed regularly. More aerations are also needed in these situations to improve infiltration.

Believe it or not even mother nature, or at least some local climates, have changed. California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) records for the Palm Springs area confirm this. The average humidity during the months of July, August and September has risen approximately 13% during the time span from 1984 to 1994. (Is it global warming or all the water sprayed in the air each night to irrigate the golf courses and landscapes?)

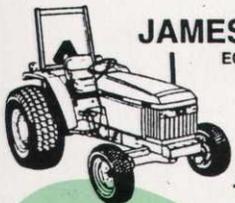
I suppose, the fact that *some things do change* keeps this business interesting. Looking back, however, it is almost frightening that most of these changes have taken place over the past ten to fifteen years. It only makes me wonder, what do we have to look forward to during the next decade? ♦

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